

Faith, Hope, and Love

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Today, I ask you to pause and examine with me three words from Paul's First letter to the Corinthians: faith, hope and love. Paul said that the greatest was love, but I believe hope sometimes trumps love.

The concept of hope is no more aptly applied than to those who have lost family members as a consequence of war, and by "lost" I mean quite literally those who have disappeared in the heat of battle. They are missing in action. Their fate is a mystery, and we reduce them to a simple set of letters - MIA.

There is no question that we love those who are lost to us. If one has been Killed in Action, there is a well-defined and universal path of sorrow and recovery the family will travel. When our loved one is a Prisoner of War, we accept it as an article of faith that our service member will, one day, come home.

Missing in Action is the status that most severely tests our resolve. It is for the missing that the jewel of hope is most important. Without hope, the families of those listed as Missing in Action are adrift in a sea of uncertainty. Regardless of the strength of their faith, of the certainty of their love, it is the quality of hope that allows them to move from day to day and nourish both faith and love.

There is a branch of the Department of Defense tasked to track down every shred of evidence in search of those Missing in Action. Sometimes they visit a promising site, but find nothing. Sometimes they recover decades - old human remains and can eventually end a family's painful wait.

The passage of decades sometimes changes the essence of hope. We accept that the family member is probably dead. But that single word, "probably," is evidence that hope is alive in the face of death. Hope matures, from the early hope that the missing will come home alive to hope that the remains of the missing will be brought home for burial on American soil. We begin to hope that we will one day know what happened. We hope, and as the goals of hope change we still cling to our memories of that missing soul. We still hope for the ending Robert Louis Stevenson gave us in his poem, Requiem: ...

Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.